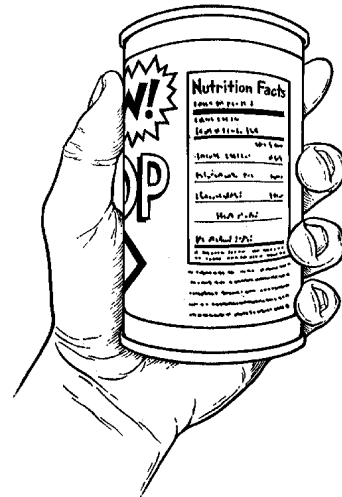


How Do I Read Food Labels?

When you go grocery shopping, take time to read the nutrition labels on your purchases. Compare nutrients and calories in one food to those in another. The information may surprise you. You want to make sure that you aren't bringing home foods high in saturated fat and cholesterol!

One easy way to do “healthier” grocery shopping is to spend more time in the outer aisles of the store where fresh foods are kept. Spend less time in the middle aisles where packaged foods, snacks and soft drinks are stocked.



How do I read the label?

- Most foods in the grocery store must now have a nutrition label and list of ingredients.
- Claims like “low cholesterol” and “fat free” can be used only if a food meets legal standards set by the government.
- The “Nutrition Facts” label contains the following information:
- Serving Size — Remember that if you eat double the serving size listed, you need to double the calories, fat and nutrients. If you eat half the size shown, cut the calories and nutrients in half.
- Calories — This is very helpful to know if you're cutting calories to lose weight.
- Total Fat — Most people need to cut back on both calories and fat! Too much fat may contribute to heart disease and cancer. The label will give you the number of grams of fat per serving (so you can keep track of your daily intake) and the number of calories from fat. Your goal is an overall intake of no more than 30 percent of your total calories from fat.
- Saturated Fat — This is one part of the total fat in food. It's a key nutrient for raising your blood cholesterol and your risk of heart disease and stroke. Eat less saturated fat!
- Cholesterol — Too much of it in your diet may lead to too much of it in your blood. And too much cholesterol in your blood can lead to heart disease and stroke. It's best to eat less than 300 mg each day.
- Sodium — Also known as salt! Healthy adults should take in less than 2,400 mg of sodium each day. That's equal to about 1 tsp. of salt. If you have high blood pressure or your doctor tells you to limit salt, you should keep your intake low.
- Total Carbohydrate — When you cut down on fat, you can eat more carbohydrates. They're found in foods like bread, potatoes, pasta, rice, fruits and vegetables.
- Dietary Fiber — Fruits, vegetables, whole grains, peas and beans are good sources and can help reduce the risk of heart disease.

- Protein — Where there's animal protein, there's also fat and cholesterol. Eat small portions.
- Vitamins and Minerals — Eating a variety of foods will help you reach your daily goal of 100% of vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium and iron.
- Daily Value — The daily values are guides for people who eat 2,000 calories each day.

If you eat more or less than that, your daily value may be higher or lower. Choose foods with a low % daily value of fat, saturated fat, cholesterol and sodium. Try to reach 100% of the daily value of total carbohydrates, dietary fiber, vitamins and minerals.

How can I learn more?

- Talk to your doctor, nurse or health care professional. Or call your American Heart Association at 1-800-242-8721, or the American Stroke Association at 1-888-478-7653.
- If you have heart disease, members of your family also may be at higher risk. It's very

important for them to make changes now to lower their risk.

- If you need help with an eating plan, ask your health care professional to recommend a registered dietitian.

Do you have questions or comments for your doctor?

- Take a few minutes to write your own questions for the next time you see your doctor. For example:

How many fat grams should I have each day?

How many calories should I eat?



South Carolina Department of Health
and Environmental Control

ML-002135 11/04



Fighting Heart Disease and Stroke

National Center

7272 Greenville Avenue

Dallas, Texas 75231-4596

americanheart.org

Your contributions to the American Heart Association or the American Stroke Association will support research that helps make publications like this possible.

©1994, 2002, American Heart Association.